

## CLAIMS

1. A method of providing a rich media item for enhancing user interaction with a messaging program comprising the steps of:

providing access to a selection of user selectable rich media items through a messaging program interface which may be used to create a message containing a user selected rich media item, wherein said rich media item comprises user perceptible content and content specific information; and

providing computer code to allow communication between the rich media item and the messaging program so that the messaging program and said rich media item can inter-operate, and so that when said message is communicated to an intended recipient, said message is communicated with said rich media item to said intended recipient so as to enable perception of said content and access to said rich media item by said intended recipient so that said intended recipient can interact with said rich media item and utilize said content specific information.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of collecting user statistics related to the usage of said rich media item.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of collecting user statistics related to the messaging program.

4. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of providing an interface through which a user may log in to a messaging service.

5. The method of claim 4, further comprising tracking a selected selection of rich media items by a user, and wherein said selection is saved so that said selection is available to said user regardless of the computer from which said user accesses said messaging service.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of automatically logging in a user into a messaging service upon initiation of said messaging program.

7. The method of claim 6, further comprising tracking a selected selection of rich media items by a user, and wherein said selection is saved so that said selection is available to said user regardless of the computer from which said user accesses said messaging service.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the rich media item is assigned an identification tag, and wherein a created message contains a rich media item identification tag, the rich media item being accessible from a server using said rich media item identification tag.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the rich media item is implemented as a flash vector animation file with sound embedded as an MP3 file.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein said selection of user selectable rich media items may be modified by a content provider by adding a new or a recommended rich media item and removing expired rich media items.
11. The method of claim 10, wherein the content provider modifies the selection of user selectable rich media items through a feed from a content manager operated by said content provider.
12. The method of claim 10, wherein an object is displayed proximate to at least some portion of the rich media item to indicate to a user that the rich media item is newly added to said selection.
13. The method of claim 1, wherein said computer code is implemented as a JavaScript application programming interface.
14. The method of claim 1, wherein said computer code controls said messaging program so that the messaging program can selectively stop playing a selected rich media item and start playing a newly selected rich media item.
15. The method of claim 1, further comprising providing a rich media interface through which said user can modify said selection of user selectable rich media items.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the rich media interface comprises a plurality of rich media item selections, received from a content provider, from which a user can select additional rich media items.

17. The method of claim 15, wherein said rich media interface is a dialog comprising a plurality of rich media item selections, a current rich media item selection, an add rich media item function, a remove rich media item function and a reorder rich media item function.

18. The method of claim 15, wherein said rich media item interface is a menu, which can comprise submenus, comprising a plurality of rich media item selections.

19. The method of claim 15, wherein said plurality of rich media item selections comprises a recently used rich media item selection.

20. The method of claim 1, wherein a user can disable said rich media items in the messaging program.

21. The method of claim 1, wherein said message is communicated to a plurality of intended recipients.

22. The method of claim 1, wherein the messaging program comprises an instant messaging program.

23. The method of claim 1, wherein the messaging program comprises an email program.
24. The method of claim 1, wherein the messaging program comprises a chat program.
25. The method of claim 1, wherein the messaging program comprises a message board program.
26. The method of claim 1, wherein said user perceptible data of said rich media item relates to a movie.
27. The method of claim 26, wherein said rich media item comprises a character from said movie, and wherein said rich media item speaks a line from said movie.
28. The method of claim 1, wherein said user perceptible data of said rich media item comprises a musical album of a recording artist and said rich media item relates to said recording artist, and wherein said rich media item sings a clip from said musical album.
29. The method of claim 1, wherein said messaging program comprises a feature for loading environments that enhance a messaging program interface.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein the rich media item interacts with the loaded environment.
31. The method of claim 1, wherein said content specific information comprises at least one of the following two items of information:
- (i) a rich media caption; and
  - (ii) a context menu item comprising one or more of the following: (a) a display string, (b) a resource identifier and (c) a command.
32. The method of claim 31, further comprising organizing a plurality of rich media items into sets identified by a set identifier and organizing said sets into categories identified by a category identifier.
33. The method of claim 31, wherein said computer code utilizes said content specific information to display said rich media caption when a cursor is positioned over said rich media item.
34. The method of claim 31, wherein said rich media caption comprises a description of the user perceptible content.
35. The method of claim 31, wherein said rich media caption comprises a textual transcription of words to be audibly perceived as part of the user perceptible content.

36. The method of claim 31, further comprising said computer code obtaining said rich media caption from said content specific information.

37. The method of claim 31, wherein said message further comprises the rich media caption as text in said message.

38. The method of claim 31, further comprising said computer code obtaining the rich media caption from a remote Internet source.

39. The method of claim 31, wherein a user can disable said rich media items in the messaging program, and wherein when the messaging program receives an indication to display a rich media item, the messaging program displays the rich media caption in place of the rich media item.

40. The method of claim 31, wherein said computer code controls said messaging program and utilizes said content specific information to display a context menu.

41. The method of claim 40, wherein the messaging program and/or said computer code can selectively populate said context menu with different context menu items.

42. The method of claim 40, wherein said computer code controls said messaging program so that said messaging program displays different context menu items in said

context menu depending on the location of said rich media item within said messaging program.

43. The method of claim 42, wherein said rich media item can be displayed in a rich media toolbar and when said rich media item is displayed in said toolbar said context menu comprises a first set of context menu items, and wherein said rich media can be displayed in a history window of a messaging program and when said rich media item is displayed in said history window said context menu comprises a second set of context menu items.

44. The method of claim 31, wherein said resource identifier comprises at least one of the following two items:

- (i) a universal resource identifier representing the location of data related to the user perceptible content of an item of rich media; and
- (ii) a messaging program resource identifier representing enhanced features of the messaging program that are related to the user perceptible content of an item of rich media.

45. The method of claim 31, wherein said resource identifier comprises a universal resource identifier representing the location of data related to the user perceptible content of an item of rich media.



46. The method of claim 31, wherein said resource identifier comprises a messaging program resource identifier representing enhanced features of the messaging program that are related to the user perceptible content of an item of rich media.

47. The method of claim 31, wherein said command comprises at least one of the following seven commands:

- (i) open a new browser window and load data located at a resource identifier;
- (ii) load another messaging program feature;
- (iii) replay rich media item;
- (iv) add rich media item to a user selection of rich media items;
- (v) display a rich media interface wherein a user is presented with a plurality of rich media items that comprises rich media items that are similar to a selected rich media item so that the user can add similar rich media items to their selection;
- (vi) mute rich media items, wherein when the messaging program receives a rich media item, the messaging program displays a description of the user perceptible content proximate to the rich media item; and
- (vii) mute rich media items, wherein when the messaging program receives a rich media item, the messaging program displays a textual transcription of words to be audibly perceived as part of the user perceptible content proximate to the rich media item.

48. The method of claim 31, wherein said command is a command to open a new browser window and load data located at a resource identifier.
49. The method of claim 31, wherein said command comprises a command to load another messaging program feature.
50. The method of claim 49, wherein said another messaging program feature comprises an enhanced instant messaging environment.
51. The method of claim 50, wherein the enhanced instant messaging environment content is related to the user perceptible content of the rich media item.
52. The method of claim 51, wherein the rich media item interacts with the loaded environment.
53. The method of claim 31, wherein said command comprises a command to replay a rich media item.
54. The method of claim 31, wherein said command comprises a command to add a rich media item to a user selection of rich media items.
55. The method of claim 31, wherein said command comprises a command to display a rich media interface wherein a user is presented with a plurality of rich media items that

- comprises rich media items that are similar to a selected rich media item so that the user can add similar rich media items to their selection.

56. The method of claim 31, wherein said command is a command to mute rich media items, wherein when the messaging program receives a rich media item when the mute command is selected, the messaging program displays a description of the user perceptible content proximate to the rich media item.

57. The method of claim 31, wherein said command is a command to mute rich media items, wherein when the messaging program receives a rich media item when the mute command is selected, the messaging program displays a textual transcription of words to be audibly perceived as part of the user perceptible content proximate to the rich media item.

58. The method of claim 1, wherein said content specific information comprises a rich media caption.

59. The method of claim 58, wherein said computer code utilizes said content specific information to display said rich media caption when a cursor is positioned over said rich media item.

60. The method of claim 58, wherein said rich media caption comprises a description of the user perceptible content.

61. The method of claim 58, wherein said rich media caption comprises a textual transcription of words to be audibly perceived as part of the user perceptible content.

62. The method of claim 58, further comprising said computer code obtaining said rich media caption from said content specific information.

63. The method of claim 58, wherein said message further comprises the rich media caption as text in said message.

64. The method of claim 58, further comprising said computer code obtaining the rich media caption from a remote Internet source.

65. The method of claim 58, wherein a user can disable said rich media items in the messaging program, and wherein when the messaging program receives an indication to display a rich media item, the messaging program displays the rich media caption in place of the rich media item.

66. The method of claim 1, wherein said content specific information comprises a context menu item comprising one or more of the following: (a) a display string, (b) a resource identifier and (c) a command.

67. The method of claim 66, wherein said computer code controls said messaging program and utilizes said content specific information to display a context menu.
68. The method of claim 67, wherein the messaging program and/or said computer code can selectively populate said context menu with different context menu items.
69. The method of claim 67, wherein said computer code controls said messaging program so that said messaging program displays different context menu items in said context menu depending on the location of said rich media item within said messaging program.
70. The method of claim 69, wherein said rich media item can be displayed in a rich media toolbar and when said rich media item is displayed in said toolbar said context menu comprises a first set of context menu items, and wherein said rich media can be displayed in a history window of a messaging program and when said rich media item is displayed in said history window said context menu comprises a second set of context menu items.
71. The method of claim 66, wherein said resource identifier comprises at least one of the following two items:
- (i) a universal resource identifier representing the location of data related to the user perceptible content of an item of rich media; and

(ii) a messaging program resource identifier representing enhanced features of the messaging program that are related to the user perceptible content of an item of rich media.

72. The method of claim 66, wherein said resource identifier comprises a universal resource identifier representing the location of data related to the user perceptible content of an item of rich media.

73. The method of claim 66, wherein said resource identifier comprises a messaging program resource identifier representing enhanced features of the messaging program that are related to the user perceptible content of an item of rich media.

74. The method of claim 66, wherein said command comprises at least one of the following seven commands:

- (i) open a new browser window and load data located at a resource identifier;
- (ii) load another messaging program feature;
- (iii) replay a rich media item;
- (iv) add rich media item to a user selection of rich media items;
- (v) display a rich media interface wherein a user is presented with a plurality of rich media items that comprises rich media items that are similar to a selected rich media item so that the user can add similar rich media items to their selection;

(vi) mute rich media items, wherein when the messaging program receives rich media item, the messaging program displays a description of the user perceptible content proximate to the rich media item; and

(vii) mute rich media items, and wherein when the messaging program receives a rich media item , the messaging program displays a textual transcription of words to be audibly perceived as part of the user perceptible content proximate to the rich media item.

75. The method of claim 66, wherein said command is a command to open a new browser window and load data located at a resource identifier.

76. The method of claim 66, wherein said command comprises a command to load another messaging program feature.

77. The method of claim 76, wherein said another messaging program feature comprises an enhanced instant messaging environment.

78. The method of claim 77, wherein the enhanced instant messaging environment content is related to the user perceptible content of the rich media item.

79. The method of claim 78, wherein the rich media item interacts with the loaded environment.

80. The method of claim 66, wherein said command comprises a command to replay a rich media item.

81. The method of claim 66, wherein said command comprises a command to add a rich media item to a user selection of rich media items.

82. The method of claim 66, wherein said command comprises a command to display a rich media interface wherein a user is presented with a plurality of rich media items that comprises rich media items that are similar to a selected rich media item so that the user can add similar rich media items to their selection.

83. The method of claim 66, wherein said command is a command to mute rich media items, wherein when the messaging program receives a rich media item when the mute command is selected, the messaging program displays a description of the user perceptible content proximate to the rich media item.

84. The method of claim 66, wherein said command is a command to mute rich media items, wherein when the messaging program receives a rich media item when the mute command is selected, the messaging program displays a textual transcription of words to be audibly perceived as part of the user perceptible content proximate to the rich media item.

85. A method of marketing comprising:



incorporating an enhanced icon into a messaging program, said enhanced icon relating to a product or service to be marketed;

providing a context menu comprising enhanced icon content specific menu items for linking users to other media related to said enhanced icon content;

providing a platform for permitting a first user to forward a message to a second user, which sent message comprises said enhanced icon; and

providing a platform for permitting said second user to forward said enhanced icons to a third user as part of a message originated by said second user.

86. The method of claim 85, wherein the messaging program comprises an instant messaging program.

87. The method of claim 85, wherein the messaging program comprises an email program.

88. The method of claim 85, wherein the messaging program comprises a chat program.

89. The method of claim 85, wherein the messaging program comprises a message board program.

90. The method of claim 85, further comprising providing a network administrator for,

receiving a rich media item from a marketing partner;

preparing the rich media item for use with said messaging program; and

allowing said marketing partner to modify their selection of rich media items.

91. The method of claim 90, wherein the network administrator comprises an automated program.

92. The method of claim 85, wherein said product comprises a movie and said enhanced icon relates to said movie.

93. The method of claim 92, wherein said enhanced icon comprises a character from said movie, and wherein said enhanced icon speaks a line from said movie.

94. The method of claim 85, wherein said product comprises a musical album of a recording artist and said enhanced icon relates to said recording artist, and wherein said enhanced icon sings a clip from said musical album.

95. The method of claim 85, wherein said messaging program comprises a feature for loading environments that enhance a messaging program interface.

96. The method of claim 95, wherein the enhanced icon interacts with the loaded environment.

97. The method of claim 85, further comprising providing an enhanced icon interface through which said users of the messaging program can modify their selection of user selectable enhanced icons.

98. The method of claim 97, wherein the enhanced icon interface comprises a plurality of enhanced icon selections, received from a content provider, from which a user can select additional enhanced icons.

99. The method of claim 97, wherein said enhanced icon interface is a menu, which can comprise submenus, comprising a plurality of enhanced icon selections.

100. The method of claim 99, wherein the menu comprises conspicuous regions for prominently displaying at least one enhanced icon selection.

101. The method if claim 100, wherein the conspicuous region comprises an advertisement.

102. An enhanced icon comprising:

user perceptible content;

an enhanced icon caption; and

context menu items related to the user perceptible content.

103. The enhanced icon of claim 102, wherein the enhanced icon is used with a messaging program, said messaging program,

providing access to a selection of user selectable rich media items through a messaging program interface which may be used to create a message, said message containing a user selected rich media item, wherein said the rich media item comprises user perceptible content and content specific information; and

providing computer code to allow communication between the rich media item and the messaging program so that the messaging program and said rich media item can inter-operate, and so that when said message is communicated to an intended recipient, said message is communicated with said rich media item to said intended recipient so as to enable perception of said content and access to said rich media item by said intended recipient so that said intended recipient can interact with said rich media item and utilize said content specific information.

104. A context menu for a graphical computer object, comprising: a menu item that is specific to user perceptible content of said graphical computer object, wherein the context menu is displayed by a messaging program comprising computer code for communicating with said graphical computer object to obtain said menu item specific to

user perceptible content of the graphical computer object that is stored in said graphical computer object.

105. The context menu of claim 104, wherein the context menu is displayed by a messaging program comprising computer code for communicating with a server to obtain one or more menu items specific to user perceptible content of the graphical computer object.

106. The context menu of claim 104, wherein the menu items comprise an advertisement that comprises information related to the user perceptible content of the graphical computer object.

107. The context menu of claim 104, wherein the menu items are a link to additional Internet media that comprises information related to the user perceptible content of the graphical computer object.

108. The content menu of claim 107, wherein the additional Internet media comprise a Web page related to the user perceptible content of the graphical computer object.

109. The content menu of claim 107, wherein the additional Internet media comprises another messaging program function related to the user perceptible content of the graphical computer object.

110. The context menu of claim 104, wherein the graphical computer object comprises an icon.

111. The context menu of claim 104, wherein the graphical computer object comprises an avatar.

112. The context menu of claim 104, wherein the menu item is a media item.

113. A system for providing a rich media item for enhancing user interaction with a messaging program comprising:

a server for communicating with a messaging program that is operative on a first computer for:

providing access to a selection of user selectable rich media items through a messaging program interface which may be used to create a message containing a user selected rich media item, wherein said rich media item comprises user perceptible content and content specific information; and

providing computer code to allow communication between the rich media item and the messaging program so that the messaging program and said rich media item can inter-operate, and so that when said message is communicated to an intended recipient, said message is communicated with said rich media item to said intended recipient so as to enable perception of said content and access to said rich media item by said

intended recipient so that said intended recipient can interact with said rich media item and utilize said content specific information.

114. The system of claim 113, wherein said server provides one or more of the following four operations:

- (i) offering said messaging program to Internet users;
- (ii) operating a messaging service for users of said messaging program;
- (iii) storing messaging service user messaging program preferences; and
- (iv) storing said rich media for access by messaging service users.

115. The server of claim 114, wherein the server operations further comprises:

- (v) offering an interface for marketing partners through which new rich media may be added items into the messaging service.
- (vi) offering an interface for marketing partners to modify rich media items already added to the messaging service.

116. The system of claim 114, wherein the system operations further comprises storing instant message environments.